

September 30, 2009: House Passes Wittman's Bill to Coordinate Chesapeake Bay Clean Up

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, the House of Representatives passed the Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act (H.R. 1053), by a bipartisan vote of 418-1. The bill, introduced by Congressman Rob Wittman at the beginning of the 111th Congress would monitor and coordinate the Bay restoration efforts amongst 10 federal agencies, six states and the District of Columbia, over one thousand localities and multiple non-governmental organizations. To date, the complexity of the participants has resulted in a muddled effort.

"Passage of this legislation is by no means a silver bullet to renew the health of the Bay. However, it is the down payment we vitally need to accomplish this effort," said Wittman.

Wittman's bill would fully implement two cutting edge management techniques, crosscut budgeting and adaptive management, to enhance coordination, flexibility and efficiency of restoration efforts. Neither technique is currently required or fully utilized in the Bay restoration efforts, where results have lagged far behind the billions of dollars spent. Both methods required by the bill have been used successfully in complex restoration efforts in the Everglades, the Great Lakes and the California Bay Delta.

"The Chesapeake Bay is at a tipping point and without a renewed commitment that increases the cleanup effort by a great deal, we will not see any level of improved water quality in our future," added Wittman.

Additionally, the bill requires the Environmental Protection Agency to appoint an Independent Evaluator (I.E.) to review and report on restoration activities, implementation of adaptive management and other topics suggested by the Chesapeake Executive Council. The I.E. would report findings and recommendations to Congress every three years.

"The passage of this bill is a testament to the fact that bipartisanship isn't dead. Legislators have come together to highlight the vital role the Bay plays in the daily lives of citizens throughout the watershed and ensure its recovery," said Wittman.

In drafting this legislation, Congressman Wittman drew heavily on his 16 years of experience as a shellfish specialist monitoring water quality and environmental health issues in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Throughout the bill's debate on the House Floor yesterday, the legislation received praise from across the aisle. Below are quotes from Members:

"Restoration of the Chesapeake Bay continues to be a very important goal of Congress and the administration," remarked Del. Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam), Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans, and Wildlife.

"I applaud the author of this legislation, Mr. Wittman of Virginia, and I again urge Members to support this very important legislation," added Bordallo.

"There's only benefit that can be had when you bring this cross-cutting prospective in terms of the dollars that are spent and I want to congratulate Congressman Wittman for bringing that kind of discipline to the overall program," stated Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD).

"I think this is a very good and strong bill it's going to enhance our efforts to protect and preserve and strengthen the Chesapeake Bay over time, I congratulate Congressman Wittman for his efforts and I urge support of the bill," said Sarbanes.

Full video of the debate can be obtained here:

http://clips.shadowtv.net/media/stv/3343/8/2009/272/14/3343_8_20090929_145120_590.wmv

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.